

YOUR NEWSPAPERS AND OURS

BY MARIA MORAVSKY

It was on the deck of a trans-pacific steamer that I saw for the first time an American newspaper.

"No, I asked you to give me only one copy of the San Francisco 'Examiner'!" I said to the deck-attendant.

"But it is one copy, ma'am", answered the servant, looking at me with surprise.

As I knew then only a few words of English, I thought that we misunderstood each other; that huge heap of paper one copy! My! a poor Russian family would be very happy to get it in wartime; all the family would spend a nice, warm evening, burning it in the open fireplace, in the middle of a fierce Russian winter.

I feel that I exaggerate a little, but you must forgive me—it is due to the bad influence of your papers. The first and the most infectious trait of your dailies is exaggeration. The head-lines are screaming! The letters are as big as the skyscrapers! I never saw such thick head-lines in my life! In Russia we would consider it immodest! I learned here, that the American journalists have different ideas about a newspaper's modesty. But the first days I was painfully shocked.

**TWO GREAT FERRY-BOATS SUNK!
INNUMERABLE VICTIMS!**

read one of the loud head-lines.

"Poor passengers from San Francisco!" I thought pityingly. "I would be alarmed, if I had a family there."

But "the poor San Franciscans" who were returning home did not

look alarmed in the least, reading the latest paper which we obtained at Honolulu. After consulting my vocabulary for a while, I found out that the accident happened . . . in another state. But this was printed in small, seed-like letters, while the "extra" head-line made one think that it happened in San Francisco. Now, if you have a good imagination, think what a panic that little trick caused among the wives who waited for their husbands, returning daily home from business by ferry-boats. Great panic, great sensation, and great sale!

The American editor is ready to print in his paper every kind of sensation, if it may result in a good sale. I suppose the first flood of sorrow upon an unexpected death of your beloved President would be succeeded by the happy thought:

"Gee! what sensational news! Fine! I wonder how many copies will be sold!"

I understand how that thirst for sensation hardens one's character: I myself was a newspaper man for a while. I remember I was genuinely glad when I was sent by my paper from Petrograd to the Caucasus and found there the terrible epidemic of black snallpox, the frequent fires in the oil-mines in Baku, and the sugar contrabanda. Such sensational things to write about! Just think! the large caravans of camels, leaving the city under cover of darkness and passing the dangerous desert toward Persia! Camels used for contrabanda, Persia,

and the wild adventures seemed as far from Petrograd as they are from a peaceful New Yorker. The black smallpox added the attraction of danger to my journey and it was a good pretext to ask better pay for my articles.

All that—the epidemic, the sugar contrabanda and the oil-mine aflame—meant unhappiness to the people; and still my shameless heart of a reporter could be satisfied with it! Of course, I abandoned that profession when I learned how it demoralized my conscience. (The Russian conscience is very restless—you must know that if you read Dostoyevsky.)

Every paper on earth likes sensations, but American papers beat them all! They not only watch and describe the wonderful happenings—they create them! That was quite new and amazing for me. If somebody happens to drop an empty box of sardines on the pavement of Chicago, you may be sure that in New York there will appear a head-line:

ANOTHER BOMB THROWN BY AN
INHUMAN ANARCHIST!

But in spite of this unlimited longing for sensation, your papers are giving such wide information about everything that one can always find the true attitude toward all that happens, can reduce the exaggeration, can dig the truth out of the heavy headlines and the thundering editorial pages. It is a great merit of the American newspapers: they always print all different opinions on any important subject; the New York "Times" for instance, prints the speeches of Socialist Hillquit! Democratic papers repeat what objections the Republicans have against the President. And they repeat it all

truly, without changing a word! One can forgive the many faults of your papers for their full, many-sided information.

But the best thing about them is the advertisements. These are simply magnificent! They are full of wit, even poetry; they read like fiction! We never had anything like that in Russia! FULL MOON TONIGHT! I read a poetical beginning of an advertisement. I thought it was the first line of a poem. But when I continued, it urged me to buy a warm plaid, because the full-moon evenings of autumn are chilly.

It is often like that with your advertisements: they begin with the most unearthly and poetical things: love and the nightingale—roses and "the skin you love to touch". And they end with woolen underwear and soap! I suspect all your publicity agents are recruited from the crowd of unsuccessful poets.

No, it must not always be so! Your advertisers use not only poetry in their trade: they also use science; for example, experimental psychology and hypnotism. One must have very strong nerves to pass indifferently these impressive cries:

STOP! LISTEN! BUY OUR GOODS!
DON'T DARE TO MOVE BEFORE YOU
TEAR OFF THAT COUPON!

For a nervous person it is a cruel persecution! Perhaps you Americans are used to it, and it does not impress you any more, but a green foreigner cannot disobey these strict orders:

Now! YOU MUST BUY IT!

START TO BEAUTIFY YOURSELF
TONIGHT!

WALK ON YOUR HEELS ONLY!

SIT RIGHT DOWN AND WRITE THAT LETTER!

They use an even more subtle form of hypnotism—they use morale! They preach to you about the future of your country and the happiness of your children; and all that—to make you buy OUR SPECIAL GARDEN HOSE.

The deafening head-lines, the overwhelming advertisements, the violent partisan attacks—all these made me dizzy when I started to read your papers. Besides, my head could not digest so many facts at once. Too much material! The war news, the baseball news, the automobile section, the Wall Street gossip, the society scandals—I felt lost, buried under all this important information. (Every one of your papers insists that all its news is important, especially the advertisements; many of them begin with the words: VERY IMPORTANT! be it about a new kind of hair pins.)

As I honestly wanted to study your country, I read your papers carefully and assiduously, from the first page to the last. But very soon I recognized that it was too big a task, too great a burden on my weak shoulders! I learned that nobody in America does that, save the greenhorns and the hopeless idlers who have nothing more to do.

Anyway, it was a good school for me: I learned how an American paper is edited, published, and sold; what are the aims and purposes of every one of them; what a bird is an American journalist and what training he gets.

I learned by and by how to find among all "important news" the really important; I saw that all the facts in

your papers are put in good order; the titles and especially the subtitles give you an idea of what the article is talking about. The paper is cleverly divided into different sections, and it is not at all difficult to find your way about in it. The American paper has a system. Its contributors are specialists. The least of your reporters gets a good training. All that was quite unusual to me.

Your average newspaper man is not highly idealistic—popularity and good pay mean too much for him. So I have little good to say about his aims and purposes; but I adore his loyalty to his profession and his wonderful training.

The American "special correspondent" is a real correspondent; if he is sent to the front, he will describe battles which he saw with his own eyes, no matter how dangerous it was to see them. An American reporter is able to go into the center of hell—to get an interview with His Majesty, the Devil. If you send him to watch the explosion of a volcano, he will open the case of his "Corona" on the verge of it and will start to typewrite his report in the midst of flame.

I exaggerate just a little, describing him—I know things about him which are very similar to what I said above. A witness of the great explosion which occurred lately in New Jersey told me a wonderful fact about a reporter from New York. It was shortly after the large shell-factory blew up. The workers and guards feared that the magazine of gunpowder would blow up next, and it would mean thousands of deaths. Panic seized all; people were running away like animals from the flaming prairies; it was a bewildered herd, which howled, howled terribly, without words . . .

"I have never before heard such an

inhuman howl!" confessed the man who told me that, "even in the bombarded cities."

He himself had tasted war in Russia. Now he was occupied in guarding powder-magazines. He wore a uniform and considered himself to be in the government service. And in spite of his uniform which obliged him to be brave he ran blindly together with others to a near-by thick forest.

"The branches beat our faces, bruised our bodies. . . . But they could not stop us. Nothing could stop our horror. And then, quite casually, I lifted my face upward, after a twig sharply struck my chin; and I saw a man on the tree, who was sitting quietly and fixing his camera—to photograph us! The sight was so unexpected, it was such a contrast to our panic, that I began to laugh! It cooled me. I stopped and started to talk with the man: he turned out to be a reporter."

When I return to Russia I will write a novel, "The American Reporter". I believe it will be my best one. Here it would be of no use to write such a story—Americans would not find anything unusual in it. You are accustomed to your reporter and don't notice his virtues any more. No one can be a prophet in his own country.

Another wonderful thing which I learned about your newspaper men is: they are taught how to write for the newspapers; you have schools of journalism. We have no such thing in Russia as a school of journalism. When a man has tried in vain every other profession or trade, when he has made bad shoes or lame tables, when he has failed in commerce or in the show business, then he becomes a journalist. It is not so bad after all, because the newspaper man needs experience and the person who has tried many

professions has a lot of experience.

The typical Russian editor is one who has been expelled from a university for radicalism. Perhaps this is the reason why almost all our papers and magazines were so radical for scores of years. To be "red" was the strongest tradition of our current literature. The real Russian writer must have talent and radical principles. Training is unnecessary. Sometimes he can succeed without talent, but without red principles—never!

In the epoch of darkest reaction we always kept in our columns that red fire of revolutionary protest, although at times it was very hard because of the censorship. Do you know that the general censorship was condemned in Russia only after the revolution in 1905? For the first months it was a great joy for our always-strangled current literature, but very soon we found out that our so-called freedom of the press was only a poor camouflage. For every "red" article editors were put in jail or sent to Siberia, often without any court-trial. Many of the experienced old editors, who remembered the censorship, used to talk about it as about a lost paradise:

"Then we knew what we could print. Now—we know nothing: a reporter who has scolded the favorite dog of a senator may be considered a criminal! Everything is so uncertain . . ."

The blessed censorship was reestablished in wartime. But the new tribe of journalists could not accustom themselves to it: it happened frequently that the censor erased a whole page of a paper and it would appear before the readers maidenly-white, because the editor had no time to replace the prohibited articles.

The unhappy editor would yield: "Say, can't you write about something

“neutral”?” But the journalists could not . . . The white pages appeared more and more often.

We used to call these white spots “smetana”, which means sour cream. The other name for it was: “the blind pages”.

Oh, how our people feared those blind pages! Every time that they appeared, the readers would think that something terrible had happened on the battle-fields. We would calculate that our fleet had been completely defeated or the best fortress had been taken, or something worse . . . Blind panic poured out of those blind pages and tormented our worried souls.

At last the old government realized the distressing influence of the white pages and forbade them. But they still appeared from time to time as a weak protest against the mighty censorship. The “Riech”, edited by Paul Miloukov, who was, later on, the Foreign Minister for a few moments, appeared once just with its title “Riech” and nothing more. Two empty pages and the sign of the editor under it! Other pages were filled with advertisements.

In mentioning the Russian advertisements, I must not omit to tell you the greatest difference between your papers and ours. We never depended so much on the advertisers. The price of our dailies was comparatively high (five copecks a copy) and any honest paper or magazine could live modestly on the money from subscribers. Our papers depended on public opinion, and that opinion was always radical and idealistic. Our journalists had to hate the old regime, to pity “the poor and oppressed”, to be brave and ready to go to prison. . . The halo of heroism always shone above the head of the Russian journalist, were he the

least underpaid reporter. People used to respect “a man who writes”. It was a noble and dangerous profession.

We had only one big conservative paper, “Novoe Vremia”; it always served the interests of the governing classes. But the overwhelming majority of our people despised its very name! It was considered shameful to write for that paper.

Ninety-nine per cent of our papers and magazines were always against the government. The editorial page, the most important part of a Russian paper, was always full of criticism. The oppressed Russian subject would read with delight how the editor, under the risk of a heavy punishment, blamed the hated “old regime”.

Even when the old government happened occasionally to do something decent, useful to the nation, even then our press would find some mistakes in it, so potent was the tradition—Hate the government!

I remember how heartily I laughed when our serious “Riech” tried to reproach the government for . . . suppressing vodka! The editors could not believe at once in the earnestness of that great reform, because it was done by the Czar. They doubted it, guessing that some mischief must be hidden at the bottom of it. . .

But in the wartime that eternally protesting spirit of our journalists became somewhat shattered. There appeared a new, rich paper, “Russkaya Volia”, with the aim “to protect the impersonal capital”. That crafty phrase which was put many times in the editorial columns meant simply, to serve some influential trustees, who were ruining Russia. The paper took special pains to defend the interests of the Leather Manufacturers’ Association, the most predatory of its kind in Russia, which was responsible for

the fact that the Russian soldiers had to go barefooted.

This paper, being the richest, tried to bribe "the conscience of Russia"—as we used to call our press. And its originators succeeded in part: Leonid Andreev and Alexandr Amfiteatrov—the two corner-stones of our journalism, considered it possible to write for "Russkaya Volia". That was a demoralizing example for the "little-men". For the first time in the history of our press the conscience of great journalists was so publicly sold! Their salaries were now bigger than those of the Romanoffs' ministers! You can see from this that the price for a pure, first-rate, long preserved conscience is high in Russia.

The foundation of that first big capitalistic paper caused great practical changes too: there appeared the luxurious evening edition, with the American-like graphic section—the third evening edition ever known in Petrograd! And they got automobiles to deliver it on time—that seemed wonderful to us!

It may be strange to you that we always had only one edition of a newspaper. Russians used to read their papers just once a day, at morning, and their thirst for news was wholly satisfied with it. I don't think the average Russian reader would believe it, if somebody said to him that there was such a thing in the world as the tenth edition of a paper. I myself could not believe my eyes when I saw such a wonder on the stands of the American cities.

The appearance of our papers was very humble, as a rule. They were very tiny and consisted of two to eight pages only. I was tremendously astonished when I saw here that big heap of paper which you call the final edition.

The contents of our papers was serious, modest, and sad. No funny pictures, no bold advertisements, no cheerfulness. The Knight of Liberty must not smile! Only the bitter laugh of the dangerous political satire sounded from time to time from the deadly-earnest pages of our dailies. All that could be very noble, but it was awfully morbid just the same.

Here in America you have another tradition: your journalist must smile, always smile, no matter what is happening in the world. Governments may totter, epidemics may devastate the country, children may starve—but the American journalist must be cheerful and smile, smile, smile.

I think this extreme cheerfulness as unreasonable as our Russian tradition of sorrow. There are epochs when it is dangerous to pretend that everything at home is all right, "everybody in good health, nobody injured and all happy". If the typical psychology of our ordinary newspaper man is the psychology of an undertaker, the typical psychology of yours is that of an ostrich. I don't like extremes and exaggerations, although I came from "anarchistic Russia". My dearest dream always was to mix a typical Russian and a typical American in a witch's cauldron and thus get a new, mild, reasonable, harmonious being.

Coming from Russia to America is like taking a hot douche after a cold bath. My nature cannot stand such terrible changes—I don't believe anyone's can! The quickest cure for every extremist is a visit to his antipodes.

If you want to learn the faults of your journalism, as I learned the faults of ours, read the Russian papers. But don't do it carelessly, don't read a Russian paper immediately after an American one: the shock may be too great!

I know that it is very difficult for an American, with his instinctive fear of every foreign language, to start

reading Russian newspapers. So I wrote this article to save you the trouble.

THE MISCELLANY OF A JAPANESE PRIEST

BY RAYMOND M. WEAVER

"It is absurd, therefore I believe." Thus in a paradox Saint Tertullian sealed his faith. Only by a similar technique of credulity can one confront the fabulous Japan of Occidental imagination with the Japan of sober fact and remain loyal to the imagination. The pleasing myth of Japan's uniqueness and perfection—like the melancholy of Jacques "compounded of many samples"—parades itself with all the authority of a well-established literary convention, and credits the inhabitants of this new Hesperides with nothing less than faultless taste, impeccable courtesy, unparalleled loyalty and divine descent. The Devil's Advocates chant in antiphony lurid warnings of the Yellow Peril: and the broad and comprehensive ignorance upon matters Japanese of the busy average man, finds little enlightenment in this jargon of conflicting voices.

Yet there is one oracle that speaks calm amidst the Babel: the unconscious national autobiography that the Japanese have left us in their literature: the truest and safest index of the character of a people. The earliest book we have written in Japanese is a history compiled in 712 A.D., almost exactly at the time when the Venerable Bede was beginning work on his "Ecclesiastical History of Our Island and Nation"; and from 712 down to the present day the Japanese

have written voluminously. In these utterances that Nippon has given to her sensations, her dreams, her achievements, her aspirations, she has articulated the true color of her life. These utterances reveal a brave, a courteous, a light-hearted, a pleasure-loving people; a people sentimental rather than passionate; nimble-witted rather than profound; ingenious and inventive, if not grandly creative; frequently achieving the exquisite, seldom, if ever, the sublime.

In comparing the literatures of England and Japan one is struck by the same contrast one feels between the frail wooden Japanese streets and the tremendous solidity of an American thoroughfare; between a Gothic cathedral and a Shinto shrine; between a Verdi opera and a Geisha entertainment; the same difference in emotional value and imaginative power. Japan has produced no Shakespeare, no Chaucer, no Fielding, no Dickens, no Shaw; rather can she boast her Malorys, her Bedes, her Herricks, her anonymous Miracle Plays and her Chronicle Drama. She rates prime among her classics an epic romance written by the tenth-century lady-in-waiting, Murasaki Shikibu—a rival in endless sentimental preciousness to Mademoiselle de Scudéry. In Japanese literature there are many arid wastes—but there are occasional delightful oases. In all the literature of Japan